CERTAIN QUERIES

Tending to Accommodation
and
Communion
of { *Presbyterian* & *Congregationall* } Churches.

BY

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Publiſhed by a Friend to whom the Author himſelfe ſent them over not long before his Death.

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Certain *Queries* tending to the mutuall Accommodation & Communion of *Presbyterian* and *Congregationall* Churches; delivered in 11 Propositions, & humbly presented both to the Consideration and Examination of them according to God;

BY Mr JOHN COTTON.

The 1. Querie.

Whether may it not be safely acknowledged, that the Congregations of Christians subject to Presbyteriall Government, preaching and professing the Truth of the Gospel, and not over-growne with ignorant and scandalous Persons, are true and holy Churches of Christ?

BEcause, such Churches, (for the *Matter* of them) consist of visible Saints, (at least a principall part of them) especially when they present themselves to sit downe before the Lord at his Table.

ble. And for the *Forme*; they doe agree together in chooſing their owne Miniſter, in attending duely to the Miniſtry of the Word and Sacraments, and in ſubmitting to the Doctrine of the Goſpel: which implyeth a reall and viſible (though implicite) profeſſion of the Covenant of grace requiſite to Church-eſtate.

Object. The Pariſh-Churches in *England* were Antichriſtian, if not in their firſt Inſtitution, yet at leaſt for theſe many hundred yeares; and were never ſince unchurched, nor new moulded out of their Anchriſtian Apoſtacy.

Anſw. 1. The Goſpel of Chriſt was preached and received in *England* ten yeares before it was in *Rome* (as may appeare by *Gildas*, and may be inferred from *Baronius* alſo, *Annal. Anno Chriſti* 35. 5. & 45. 1.) and that by the Miniſtry of Apoſtles and Apoſtolick men, who doubtleſſe did at firſt inſtitute Churches, not after the Pattern of *Rome* (which then was not a Church) but according to the Patterne of the Apoſtles.

2. Neither were they unchurched by the Antichriſtian Apoſtacy which afterwards

wards grew upon them (as a Leproſie) but were onely corrupted and polluted, even in many fundamentalls, both in Doctrine, Worſhip, & Government, which made them like unto the *Iſraelites* under the Apoſtacy of *Jezabel*, the generallity being carryed away by the Corruption of the times, but a Remnant reſerved (through grace) which bowed not the knee to *Baal*.

3. Since the Beginning of the *Reformation*, many of the Church-members (by the power of the Goſpel) reformed to a new eſtate of viſible Saints, and the fundamentall corruptions in Doctrine and worſhip were purged away, and both of them ſo renued as that the preſence and power of Chriſt was diſcerned in the face of the Ordinances. And for the *Government*, though it give not being (but wel-being to Churches yet) it hath alſo been growing more and more into better order unto this day. In ſo much that Proteſtant Churches have renounced fellowſhip with Antichriſt and his Churches, and have ſeparated from them in Doctrine, Worſhip, and Government: which if it reach not to a new-churching, yet it is a renuall

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of their Church estate, and a new moulding of them into a more holy way of Administration of Church-Ordinances; so that now they stand as Churches gathered out of the world both of Antichristians and of Pagans. The *Israelites* after their Returne from under the Apostacy of *Jezabel*, did neither solemnely unchurch themselves of their former corrupt estate, nor Inchurch themselves into a better new estate; but being called to Repentance by the Kings Proclamation, and their hearts being bored of God to submit themselves thereto, though they fell short of a full Purification, yet they were received to the *Lords Supper* (the Passeover) together with their Brethren of the purer Church of *Judah*. 2 Chro. 30. 18, 19, 20.

The 2d. Querie.

Presupposing then the Presbyterian Congregations to be true Churches, *Whether hence It will not cleerely follow, that the Ministers called by them (being otherwise men of Ministeriall gifts) are true Ministers; and the Sacraments administred by*

by them are true Seales of the Covenant of Grace?

The 3d. Querie.

Nevertheleſſe, *Whether may it not be juſtly doubted, that the ſtate of both Churches is ſinfully defective; The Presbyterian, partly in their Materialls, in caſe the Members, diverſe of them, be (not profeſſed Saints, but) either ignorant or ſcandalous, and apparently carnall and worldly: partly in their Government, by the Presbyters of other Churches; which way of Government, though it had place (in ſundry Caſes) in the Nationall Church of the old Teſtament, yea, and in the New Teſtament, might be practiſed for a time by the Apoſtles themſelves (who were Oecumeniall Governours of all Chriſtian Churches:) yet the ſame was never delegated nor commended to the Paſtors and Teachers of particular Congregations? The Congregationall likewiſe how can they be excuſed, in caſe there be any ſuch as doe admit all manner of Sects into their Covenant and Communion; and will not allow the Civill Magiſtrates to proceed to the Cenſure of ſeducing Hereticks and prophane Blaſphemers?*

The

The 4. Querie.

For the Healing of which defects; *were it not much to be wished that the Members of Presbyterian Churches, did once publickly professe their Faith and Repentance before their partaking of the Lords Table? (as John Baptists Disciples did before their Baptisme, and as Members of Congregationall Churches doe before their Admission:) that so None such as were ignorant or scandalous might be admitted to the Lords Table till they were duely approved to be Men of knowledge, sound in the Faith, and blamelesse in conversation?* And further also, *whether would it not much conduce to a more full and cleere acceptance of their Administrations, If their Elders in the Classis did put forth no Authoritative Act, touching the Members of other Churches, but consultative onely; nor touching their owne, but (upon hearing the advice of Fellow Elders in difficult cases) to proceede each one with the Cognizance and Consent of his owne Church at home respectively?*

The 5. Querie.

For want or Neglect hereof, Though the Members of Presbyterian Churches should discerne

discerne some Defects in the Order and Government of their Churches; yet whether may they suddenly breake off Communion with them till they have convinced them of their Defects, and duely and patiently waited for their Reformation?

It may seeme No: For if we must take a more delatory course for the healing of a private Brother, in a way of brotherly love, with much meekness and patience; how much more ought we so to walke towards an whole Church?

The 6. Querie.

Such a Brother, though as yet remaining a Member of a Presbyterian Church yet sensible of the Defects of his owne Church, and being otherwise knowne to be fit, why may he not lawfully and without scruple be received to partake at the Lords Table (as occasion serveth) in a Congregationall Church?

For such an one is both a Member of a true Church, and cleansed from the defects of his owne Church.

The 7. Querie.

Yea, suppose a godly Christian doe continue

Presbyterian in his Judgement, and yet doe approve also of a Congregationall way, and is desirous to joyne in Covenant with a Congregationall Church, whether may be not in due order be lawfully admitted and continued a Member of a Congregationall Church? Yea further, Notwithstanding the different state and way of Presbyterian and Congregationall Churches, and the Defects which the one or the other may observe or surmize either in other; yet (even whilest they so stand and walke) whether may not the Members of either without just offence, mutually Communicate one with another (as occasion shall be offered) at the Lords Table?

The Affirmative seemeth probable; For as Error in Judgement about Discipline is not an Heresie against the Foundation of Christian Religion. And the Apostle instructeth Christian Churches to receive the Christian Jewes into their Church-fellowship, who yet dissented from them about the observation of Leviticall Rites, which were as much discrepant from the Truth of the Gospel in the Order of worship, as these other be in Order of Government.

Besides,

Besides, God accepteth cleanness of heart in his faithfull servants in their approaches to his Table, though there be defects in full cleansing, according to the Order of the Sanctuary. 2 *Chron.* 30. 18, 19, 20.

The 8. Querie.

If a godly Minister called to Office by a People professing Godliness (whether under Episcopacy, or Presbytery) and afterward repenting of any knowne sinne in his way, shall be desirous of a more pure Reformation; whether may not his godly people acknowledge his Ministeriall Calling without sinne?

Why not? For he had the Essence of a lawfull Calling before, in the free choice of his godly People, and in his owne free acceptance of them and of their Call. Nevertheless, if any of his godly People should stumble at his former Calling, whether may not a more select Company and body of the People renue their Call of him, and there to accept the Concurrence and Consent of the rest of the Congregation? And whether may not he also doe well

(instead of stiff standing upon the validiy of his former Calling) to condescend to renue his Acceptance of them, yea, and to receive a New Ordination from them, with expresse designation to the Office, either of a Pastor or Teacher; and that without prejudice or dishonour to his former Calling? For a renued Act doth not invalidate (much lesse evacuate) the old, but cleare it and confirme it (so farre as there is any thing of God in it) as in Scripture all Ingeminations doe. *Saul* was thrice Ordained King over *Israel*, 1 *Sam.* 10. 1. & *ver.* 24. & 11. 14, 15. thrice to the same Calling, and with severall solemnities. Neither is Ordination of the Essence of a Ministeriall Calling, but a solemne Adjunct of it; which may be renued upon occasion of any New spirituall Imployment, or Function, Place or People, *Acts* 13. 2, 3.

The 9. Querie.

If the godly Members of a Congregation formerly subject to Episcopacy, but repenting of their sinfull subordination thereunto, and

and (being ſtudious of Reformation) have ſolemnly Covenanted to endeavour the ſame, and have choſen their former godly Miniſters (one or more) into the Paſtors or Teachers Office; Whether may not thoſe Miniſters withhold their Ignorant and carnall Hearers from the Lords Table (though they had their conſent to their Election) untill they be able to diſcerne the Lords Body, and be fit to receive it without prophaning it? But yet, in the meane time, whether may they not diſpence ſome other Miniſteriall Acts unto them, as to Preach the Word, and alſo to Catechize them and their Families? And if hereby they ſhall attain unto ſo much knowledge of the Principles of the Doctrine of the Goſpel, as to profeſſe before the Church both their need of Chriſt and his Covenant to themſelves, and the Seale thereof unto their Seed, and alſo their owne Duty of ſubjection unto Chriſt in his Ordinances; and ſhall likewiſe be found free from any open ſcandall, or elſe openly judge themſelves for the ſame; Whether may it not be lawfull for the Miniſter to admit them to the Lords Table, and their Children to Baptiſme?

For it is not with ſuch as with Iſhmael and Eſau, who though they were borne in the Church, and ſealed under

the Covenant of *Circumcision*, yet when they grew up to yeares, the one mocked at the Heire of the Covenant, and the other despised the Birth-right of the Covenant; and so the one was cast out, and the other withdrew himselfe from the fellowship of the Church, and both of them deprived their children of *Circumcision*. But such is not the Case here of these we speake of; but rather they are like the Seed of the *Israelites*, who though many of them were not sincerely godly, yet whilst they held forth the publick Profession of Gods People (*Deut.* 26. 3. to 11.) and continued under the wing of the Covenant and subjection to the Ordinances; They were still accounted an *holy Seed* (Ezr. 9. 2.) and so their children were Partakers of *Circumcision*. Yea further though themselves were sometimes kept from the Lords Supper (the Passeover) for some or other uncleanness, yet that debarred not their children from *Circumcision*.

Against this, may it not seeme vaine to stand upon a Difference between the Church of *Israel* and our Churches of the New Testament, in that theirs was

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a *Nationall* Church, and ours *Congregationall*? For the ſame Covenant which God made with the *Nationall* Church of *Iſrael* and their Seed, It is the very ſame (for ſubſtance) and none other which the Lord maketh with any *Congregationall* Church and our Seed. When the Jewes and their children were cut off from the fatneſs of the Olive, we and our children were engrafted into their roome and eſtate, *Rom.* 11. 17, 19. ſo that we are now become συγκληρόνομοι, σύσσωμοι, καὶ συμμέτοχοι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, coheires, concorporate, and compartners with them of the *ſame promiſe* in Jeſus Chriſt, *Eph.* 3. 6.

The 10. Querie.

When any Chriſtians deſire to be admitted into the Church, & the Covenant thereof, whether is it regular that the Elders ſhould take all the Tryall of them in a private Conſiſtory alone? unleſſe it be in way of preparation, that ſo they may more fitly and ſafely commend them to the publick Tryall of the whole Church? But were it not meete, that the laſt Tryall of Members, upon which they (being approved) are received either

into the Church in a Congregationall way, or to the Lords Supper in a Presbyteriall way, should be transacted before the Church?

For as no Members are to be cast out of the Church-Communion, but by the Judgement and Consent of the Church (as well the Brethren as the Elders) so none should be received into the Communion of the Church, but with the approbation and Consent of the Church.

The 11. Querie.

Whether is it just matter of Offence, If a Member of any Church, which lyeth under the Leaven of Corruption, after the use of all good meanes for the healing of the corruptions of his owne Church (be it Presbyteriall or Congregationall) and after long waiting for the same in vaine, shall at the length (for the peace and Comfort of his owne Conscience, and out of conscionable Desire to walke before the Lord in all purity) quickly and orderly remove his Relation, and adjoyne himselfe to a Church more reformed, yet not condemning the Church (as no Church) from which he removeth?

For if a man may remove his habita-

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tion for outward eaſments and conveniences, and then the removall of his Relation is eaſily granted without offence: Then why may he not, for the eaſe of his Conſcience, remove his Relation, though not his Habitation? unleſſe his Habitation were *Jure divino*, an inſeparable Adjunct to his Relation, or his relation to his Habitation? Chriſtians (as Brethren) are called of God to bear one anothers Burdens, *Gal.*6. 2. If it be a Burden to ſtay in Communion, let his Brethren eaſe his Burden with a Diſmiſſion.

Glory be to God in Chriſt Jeſus, and Peace to all his Iſrael.

UNto the aforeſaid *Queries* of the Reverend Author, this alſo may briefly be added, to make up the number round.

The 12. Querie.

Whether it be unlawfull, or may be truly accounted a neceſſary cauſe of Diſorder or Confuſion for godly Chriſtians, living in ſeverall

verall Precincts or Parishes (not far distant, but so as they may ordinarily meet together in one place) to joyne in Church-fellowship together, for mutuall spirituall edification?

That 'tis a very convenient and desirable thing for the Members of a particular Congregation, to inhabit and dwell as neer together as they may, in regard of their meeting together upon all occasions, and of mutuall watchfullnesse over each other, and of spirituall helpfulnesse unto one another, is easily granted by all: yet it will not therefore follow, that 'tis an unlawfull and disorderly thing for them to have their Abiding and Residence in divers Precincts and Parishes.

Indeed 'tis true, that it hath been accounted by the Prelates and the Prelaticall party, a very disorderly and unlawfull thing, and that which did expose to the greatest of their spirituall censures, for people ordinarily to goe to the Assemblies of Christians out of their owne *Parish*. But their Account doth not make or prove it to be so: neither doth it seem really and in truth to be so: For,

1 The Constitution of *Parochiall* or *Parish-*

Pariſh Churches, is not of Divine, but of humane Inſtitution, and that too in the very darkeſt times of Popery and Superſtition, *viz.* about 700 years ago, as learned Mr. *Selden* (in his Book of *Tythes*, ch. 9.) ſeems to intimate. So that although it may ſeem a diſorder, (in regard of that limitation of Pariſhes) for the Pariſhioners of one place to joyne themſelves unto the *Church Aſſemblies* in another; yet not in regard of any thing appearing to the contrary from the Scripture, which is the rule for Chriſtians to walk by, eſpecially in matters belonging to Church-Adminiſtration, and Government. Neither will it (I ſuppoſe) be affirmed by any intelligent Chriſtian (who underſtanding in any meaſure the true Nature of a *particular* Church) that Pariſh-bounds are the conſtituting cauſe of a particular Church or Congregation; for it cannot be maintained that every individuall perſon living in ſuch a Pariſh bounds, is therefore a Member of that Church there, except it can be proved, that profeſſed Turks, or Jewes, or Indians (who through providence may be brought into the Land,

Land, and so necessarily reside in some Parish or other, there being hardly any parcell of ground free in any part of *England*, from belonging to the bounds of some Parish or Towne) are as reall and true Members of the Church there, as any Christian man or woman in the *Parish*. I conceive it neither any solecisme or Paradox to affirm, that there may be a Parish where there is no true Church of Christ, and a true Christian Church where there is no Parish.

2 It may seem too great a bondage and slavery, both for any *Church* (whether Presbyter: or Congregationall) to be forced to receive all into fellowship in all the Ordinances, who have their habitation or residence in the same *Parish* bounds with them: and also for particular *persons* to be necessitated to be of this or that particular Congregation, in fellowship with such Members, and under the Ministry of such a man, which they cannot find so suitable to their spirits, and so profitable for their spirituall edification, as some others, which may not be far off from them. And whereas it may fall out (which possibly may come in here

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as an Objection) that the Minister, under whom a man liveth, is taken away by death, and another one called into his place and Office by the generality of the Church, who may be as unsuitable unto the Spirit of this or that Brother, as the Minister of the Parish where he dwells, or as any other, shall not be bound to submit to the choice of the Church, or must the Church suspend their choice upon the Negative vote of any one Brother? In such a case 'tis lawfull for that dissenting Brother, who cannot call such a man to be his Minister, nor owne him as his Pastour or Teacher, to desire a Letter of dismission to some other Church and Officer, whom he can more freely and comfortably close in his spirit withall, and I suppose that Church, with whom he hath fellowship at the present, is bound to yield unto his equall and just desire, that so they may part in a loving and brotherly manner. We doe generally allow every servant so much liberty for his outward comfort and advantage, as to choose his owne Master, in whose Family, and under whose Government and inspection he is to live, and

and why should not Christians also (being made free-men by Christ) have as much liberty for their spirituall comfort and edification, to chose the particular Church under whose teaching and inspection they are to abide: And why else hath the Lord (out of his infinite goodnesse and wisedome) given out diversity of gifts to divers of his Servants in the Ministry, but to suite the variety of spirits and dispositions in his people? Every lock not agreeing with every key; as our Reverend Author was wont to express himselfe, speaking of this very thing.

3 Experience doth also testifie, *de facto*, that such a course is possible to be used and practised without making such disorder and confusion, as is conceived by some: For notwithstanding it be practised by some Churches (not onely *Congregationall*, but *Presbyteriall* also, and *Classicall*) to have their Members scattered up and down in severall Precincts or *Parishes*, yet there have not any such confusion and disorder followed thereupon: as we have seen by the constant practice of our Brethren in the Congregations both of the *Dutch* and

and *French* here amongſt us in *England*, as *viz.* in *London*, *Norwich*, *Canterbury*, *Colchester*, and in ſuch other places where they doe inhabit; who although they be diſperſed throughout the Cities and Townes where they live, yet are not thought, nor ever were by any (except poſſibly by ſome of the Lordly Prelates, who out of their ſuperſtitious zeale did ſeek to undermine and diſſolve their Congregations) to be any occaſion of diſorder and confuſion by their Meeting together in their holy Aſſemblies, from all parts of the Cities and Townes where they dwell. And why might not the like liberty be allowed unto the *Engliſh* themſelves, without any juſt feare of diſorder thereby? There ſeems nothing but cuſtome againſt it, for had it been but the practice and courſe of the *Engliſh*, as it hath beene of the other, certainly it would not be accounted more diſorderly then theirs is.

Onely if (while the diviſion by Pariſhes doe continue) men doe allow and contribute, not onely toward the Poor, but alſo toward the Preaching of the word in their ſeverall Pariſhes, that

that the word may be dispensed all the Land over, I should not gainsay it, as I suppose the brethren both of the *French* and *Dutch* have been wont to doe, in the severall Parishes where they live.

Finally, *Brethren be of one mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.*

FINIS.

The RESULT OF A SYNOD AT CAMBRIDGE IN *New-England*, Anno. 1646.

CONCERNING

The { Power of Magistrates in matters of the First Table.
Nature & Power of Synods; and other matters thereunto belonging.

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